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The Truth About the Russian Government and the Ritual Murder Trial

Discourse Delivered at
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Sunday, November 2, 1913

BY
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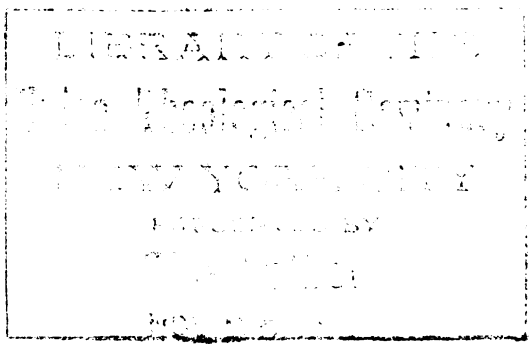

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The Truth About the Russian Government and the Ritual Murder Trial

My friends, it is hardly necessary for me to assure you that I begin this fourth season of our Sunday morning lectures with the greatest pleasure, with the feeling that they have been blessed in the past, and that under God's guidance they will be blessed in the season which commences today. I have but one regret this morning. It is a matter of profound sorrow to me that I was unable to choose for the theme of my lecture this morning a subject full of the spirit of good cheer; but the occurrences in Russia, that land of despotism and hate, demanded of me that I should devote my attention on this Sunday morning to the baseless indictment of our Jewish religion that has been framed by the Russian government in its prosecution of the trial for ritual murder in the City of Kiev. I wish that I could ignore the occurrences in Russia. But what has happened in the City of Kiev during the course of the ritual murder trial is something to which we dare not close our eyes, is something about which we ought to be properly informed.

In my library I have an anti-Semitic book more than two hundred years old, written in the German language. It contains as its only pictorial illustration a wood-cut, showing a child of less than three years of age, lying bound upon a board, with its flesh pierced with a thousand sharp pointed spikes. Beneath this wood-cut are the words, "Simon of Trent," and the explanatory note that in the year 1475 this lad had been foully done to death by the Jews in order that his blood might be used by them for ritual purposes in commemoration of their Passover. A duplicate of this wood-cut was found on a bridge in the city of Frankfort on the Main where passers-by might behold it, that they might be reminded that the Jews

are fiends in human guise, that they might believe that the Jew is made actually a kind of living vampire by his religion, because his religion, it was said, requires him to use a Christian child's blood in the observance of his Passover festival, the festival of Liberty, of Redemption, of Emancipation for all humanity. When I showed this wood-cut, as I often did, to my friends, to whom I was showing the treasures of my library, I felt that I could well afford to smile at the outlived superstitions of medieval times, the out-grown prejudices that have been left behind with the Dark Ages. I never believed that in a nation that makes pretensions to civilization, and in the 20th century, the old accusation would be revived, the old baseless charge would again be called to life in order to serve as an excuse for the persecution of the hapless Jewish victims of prejudice and passion.

Late events in Russia have proved to our full satisfaction that the gratification which I believed I might feel that the blood-accusation was done forever was entirely unfounded. A Jew, Mendel Beiliss by name, has been languishing in prison for more than two years, with a charge hanging over his head that he was the murderer of a Christian boy, Andrew Yushinsky, and that the murder was perpetrated with the purpose of extracting the blood from the veins of the victim, and utilizing it in the celebration of the Jewish Passover. I have no words in my vocabulary for the foulness, the vileness, the utter baselessness of the indictment against the defendant in this case, which involves in its charges an indictment against the whole Jewish religion, or, at any rate, a sect of it.

In preparing my discourse for this morning, I have gone through several volumes of Jewish history, in order to refresh my memory concerning the famous cases of blood-accusation against the Jews that have disfigured the pages of history. I can find no exact counterpart of the present blood-accusation. The nearest parallel to the Mendel Beiliss ritual murder trial occurred 73 years ago in the City of Damascus. In that case also the whole machinery of the local and national government was set in motion in a plot to discredit for ulterior motives the Jewish religion. On February 5, 1840, a

Capuchin monk, Father Thomas, disappeared from a Damascus monastery. It was known that he had had a religious disputation with a Mohammedan, and that in the course of this disputation the Mohammedan had threatened the life of the Christian monk. When Father Thomas disappeared mysteriously on the evening of February 5th, 1840, there was a great agitation in the City of Damascus, not for the purpose of unearthing the murderer, but with the object in view of fastening the crime upon the Jews of that city. No attempt was made to trace the Mohammedan, who was known to have been engaged in a religious disputation with Father Thomas; the only serious attempt at bringing about any solution whatever of the mystery of the disappearance of Father Thomas was in the direction of bringing the crime to the door of the Jewish inhabitants of that city.

A Jewish barber, under the pressure of torture made a supposed confession in which he implicated seven of the wealthiest and most prominent Jewish inhabitants of Damascus. These men were seized by the Governor and were carried to prison. They denied their guilt. They claimed to have had no knowledge whatever of the circumstances surrounding the disappearance of Father Thomas. In spite of their earnest protestations of innocence, the tortures that were used against them were continued mercilessly, and, finally, when it was found that no confession of guilt could be extracted from them, they were dismissed. The tortures that were imposed upon them were hellish in their fiendish and diabolical ingenuity. These men were leaders of the Jewish community, one of them over eighty years of age, and they were not only whipped on the soles of their feet with the bastinado, but their teeth were torn from their sockets and the hair of their beards plucked out, and they were compelled to stand continuously for thirty-six hours without food, drink or sleep, watched by the soldiers of Sheriff Pasha, and made to suffer untold agonies during the infliction of this malicious torture. When they were dismissed, Sheriff Pasha, the governor of Damascus, was not satisfied. He confined in a locked room over sixty children between the ages of three and ten, deprived them of

food and drink, and when the children whimpered and cried out with their childish voices that they were starving, the mothers of these children were brought near, in the hope that the suffering of their young might exact a confession of guilt from them. But in spite of the diabolical ingenuity of this method of compelling a genuine, or a counterfeit, confession, the purposes of Sheriff Pasha were foiled. The persecutions continued. The better element among the Mohammedans and Christians in Damascus disapproved, as many of the better element in Russia today disapprove, but they were powerless to prevent the outrages. Here and there and everywhere through the City of Damascus, Jews were violently seized and cast into prison. The matter became an international scandal. There were protests in many of the great cities of the world. Sir Moses Montefiore, of London, who had been Sheriff of the City of London, was encouraged by Queen Victoria, and by Lord Palmerston, then prime minister, to undertake a journey to Cairo, the seat of the Syrian government, in order to strive to bring about a mitigation, if not a cessation, of the terrible and unjust tortures that were inflicted upon the Jewish population of Damascus. With Sir Moses Montefiore, as you know, went Adolph Cremieux, the great Jewish French advocate. As a result of their eloquent intervention, and in grudging deference to the power of public opinion abroad, the Khedive of Egypt, who was the ruler of Syria, decreed that the persecutions must cease, and granted a pardon to all the Jews on whom the shadow of guilt had rested. But Moses Montefiore was not satisfied with the pardon. A pardon implied that wrong had been done. He demanded complete exculpation for the Jews of Damascus. His representations were finally so successful that the Syrian rulers not only issued a fiat, granting the Jews protection, but furnished in unequivocal language an absolutely convincing acknowledgment of their perfect innocence of the charge that had been laid at their doors. A remarkable thing in connection with the Damascus affair was that Tsar Nicholas of Russia likewise raised his voice in protest against the harshness and the cruelty and the

inhumanity of the methods used against the Jews of Damascus. Has Russia gone back? Has history retrograded instead of advancing? Is it conceivable that in this 20th century of enlightenment the charge of ritual murder should still be seriously entertained?

Originally the charge of ritual murder was made, not against the Jews, but against the Christians. In Rome, when the Christian missionaries first made their appearance, the rabble were incited against them by the false charge that the Christians, in their communion service, used the blood of human beings. This charge of the pagan Romans against the small struggling Christian community of the Eternal City was buttressed by the known fact that the founder of the Christian religion had exhorted his followers to partake of his blood and of his body; and the service of the wine and of the bread was misinterpreted by the pagan Romans as being an index of the fact that the simple Christian community of the Eternal City indulged in the horrible practice of using for religious rites the blood of human beings. The Passover service in the homes of the Jews and the Christian communion service are closely related. The former is the parent stock, of which the latter is the vigorous sprout. The points of resemblance between the two, on the surface, are especially striking, the wine and the bread being the symbols used in both of them. The Christians forgot that they were originally the scapegoats of the blood-accusation. The Christians forgot that this charge was levelled, in the first instance, not against the Jews and their Passover service, but against them and their communion service. And the nominal Christians of the Middle Ages used, and the nominal Christians of Russia today are using, every hellish power at their command in order to make the Jewish religion stand sponsor for so repulsive a practice.

At the time that the Damascus charges were notorious throughout the world, a similar case arose in Rhenish Prussia, in the City of Juelich. A Christian disappeared. The Jews were charged with having made way with him. A girl of nine years came forward to support the charge, claiming

that she had been stabbed by Jews who were trying to utilize her for the purpose of ritual murder. She showed a wound upon her body. Her brother, a boy of six, corroborated her statement. This blood-accusation, however, collapsed very soon. Under the enlightened methods of Prussian jurisprudence it could not long stand intact. The man whose disappearance was the cause of the agitation was found to be alive. The wound in the side of the nine-year-old girl was found to be a blood-stain that had been daubed there by malicious persons who wished to vent their spite upon the Jews. The utter collapse of this ritual murder charge should have its parallel in the case of Mendel Beiliss, that has now attracted to it the attention of the entire civilized world.

In other cities throughout this country and in the leading metropolitan communities of Europe mass meetings have been held to raise a voice of protest against the ritual murder trial in the City of Kiev. We have planned no mass meetings here, we have arranged for no united effort upon the part of the entire community. I believe that such an effort should begin, not with us, but with the Christians; for, beginning with us, a mass meeting is not as likely to be effective as if it begins with the Christians. If such a mass meeting is not held here, at least the true facts about the blood-accusation should be made known to our people, and to all those who are interested in the subject. What are these facts? Have the Jews ever, either as a whole or on the part of any of their sects, countenanced ritual murder? You have never heard that this was so. I have never heard that this was so. The literature of the Hebrews contains not a single passage in which support for such a contention might justly be found. The Jewish philosopher, Moses Mendelssohn, took a solemn oath that ritual murder was never practiced by the Jews, or encouraged or demanded by the Jewish religion. The great Dutch Jewish scholar, Manasseh Ben Israel, took a solemn oath in the 17th century that Judaism exacted of its followers no such abominable observance. But what are the solemn oaths of Jews in the presence of the prejudice and the passion of the people who wish, not the facts, but who wish only to arrive at a

conclusion, which has already been formed in their minds, in order to fasten terrible crimes upon a whole people, upon an entire religion. We have, however, Christian testimony to the same effect. It was the great church historian, Professor Neander, of Berlin, who wrote a denunciation of the medieval lie, as he termed it, of the blood accusation, in 1840, at the time of the Damascus agitation. Professor Neander was well qualified to speak on this subject. He was a leader in the Christian church, a professor in the theological department of the University of Berlin, a writer of voluminous books upon ecclesiastical history that are even to the present day, standard works. Furthermore, Professor Neander was, by birth, a Jew. Up to his 17th year he had lived the Jewish religion. If the Jewish religion had countenanced any such practices as ritual murder, he would have known it, and as one who had abandoned the Jewish religion and embraced the Christian religion, he would not have hesitated to speak the whole truth, and would have been able to speak out of the abundance of perfect knowledge. More valuable than the solemn oath of Moses Mendelssohn and Manasseh Ben Israel, therefore, is the protest against this wicked libel, emanating from the pen of Professor Neander. Books have been written by such unbiased men as Professor Strack, of the theological faculty of the University of Berlin, to prove how absolutely without foundation the ritual murder charge is. Several popes have branded it as an evil-minded untruth. But Russia will not listen to reason. The Russians will gladly twist any fact that can be wrenched into a semblance of verisimilitude in order that the guilt of the Jews may be proved to them, if not to the world, satisfactorily. In Kiev these days there is no such thing as martyrdom of the Jews by the rack and by the faggot. In Kiev these days there are not forced confessions extracted by torture. The trial that is being conducted there has the form of legal procedure. But, though it has the outward semblance of legal procedure, it is a travesty on justice. It is a barbaric caricature of fairness and honor. It is a scandal, whose stench is strong in the nostrils of all right-thinking people. Mendel Beiliss will have pressed on his brow the

crown of a martyr. We have no saints in our religion, designated as such by ecclesiastical authority, but if we had saints canonized by our religion, this patient sufferer, languishing in a Russian dungeon for more than two years, would be well worthy of having the halo of sainthood surround his head. Mendel Beiliss has been exculpated in the sight of civilized men. The facts that were brought to light in the course of the trial at Kiev demonstrate beyond any peradventure whatever that others than he were the perpetrators of the foul murder of which they are trying to show that he has been guilty. Mendel Beiliss may languish in jail. The Russian government may bring forward experts and renegades to support its contentions, but the world stands aghast that such a thing can be in this 20th century, and the world refuses to accept the findings of a court that has been manipulated so obviously. The Russian government is behind this trial. Upon the throne of Russia sits a weakling, a man who has a mental disorder, that is known to all who are familiar with his real nature; a man who listens to soothsayers and miracle-workers of the type of Father John; a man in whose breast every superstition finds ready entrance. This royal, superstitious, medieval relic upon the Muskovite throne is the court of last resort. From him has gone forth the mandate that Mendel Beiliss shall be found guilty, not because the individual is a matter of concern to the Tsar, but because some apology must be made to the world for the fiendish Russian persecution of the Jewish people. If the Russian government can convict a Jew with even the semblance of justice of having committed ritual murder, then the Russian government will be vindicated in its brutal persecution; then its atrocities will be in a measure justified. But all civilized men will refuse to believe the findings of a court that has been so obviously manipulated as that which is now sitting in the City of Kiev. What is the evidence that has been fabricated? The only damaging evidence that has been adduced against Mendel Beiliss is from an archimandrite who has declared that after he had embraced the Christian religion, while he was still a youth, he had been told that the Jews committed ritual murder, and that

if the bowels of the earth were to open up, the bones of many Christians who had been done to death by the Jews in order that their blood might be used at the Passover festival, would cry out for revenge. This statement is one of hearsay alone. Imagine the condition of this archimandrite as a lad. He had been torn loose from the ties of his Jewish home. He had been converted to Christianity. The people who converted him were interested in prejudicing his mind as far as possible against the Jews. Every false story they knew concerning the Jews, we may be sure, they poured into his eager ear. The lad naturally imbibed a great deal of misinformation. This misinformation, this hearsay evidence, is seriously listened to in a modern court. The other bit of possibly damaging evidence against Beiliss was from the lips of a medical expert. If the blood had been extracted for ritual purposes, physicians ought undoubtedly to be able to tell by the condition of the body that this had been done. Within the last few days, according to a cablegram from Russia, which was printed in most of our American newspapers, a Russian medical expert deposed that the wounds upon the body of Yushinsky were such as to lead him to believe that ritual murder had been committed! Why? Because these wounds were a multiple of the sacred number 7. In refutation of the statement that ritual murder requires that some multiple of the number 7 be the number of wounds inflicted, we might mention that in the year 1453 the Jews of the City of Breslau were accused of the same crime. The method which it was charged they had used was that they had kidnapped a boy from his home, and after keeping him for several weeks and fattening him for the slaughter, they had put him into a barrel, which had been lined with short spikes, and had rolled him about in that barrel on the surface of the sharp spikes until life was extinct. If the number 7 is an important factor in a case of ritual murder, it either applies to the case that occurred in Breslau in the year 1453, if that story was true, or it applies not at all. If the trumped-up account of the method used there was true, and we know it was not, then the number 7 could play no role whatever in the blood-ritual. Either the Breslau story is false or the Russion medical

expert's testimony is false, unless they are both false, as, of course, they are. Expert evidence is coming more and more into disrepute. It is a pity that men of learning should be found who will sell their opinion in the open market, who will twist scientific facts in order to make them support contentions either one way or the other. The expert evidence in the Mendel Beiliss trial is absolutely worthless. The archimandrite's evidence in the Mendel Beiliss trial is absolutely worthless. If the court of Kiev finds Beiliss guilty, it will be because of the evidence of these two men and on no other grounds whatever, and if this is the sole evidence, then the trial is what it is said by all fair thinking people to be, a caricature, a travesty, a farce, a scandal of our 20th century civilization.

Let us not feel secure until every scintilla of doubt has been removed from the minds of credulous persons that the Jewish faith might have possibly countenanced so nefarious a custom. Let us protest that the Jewish religion, even in the time when cabalistic rites were ascendant in the Middle Ages, was a religion of love, of kindness and of holiness, and not a cannibalistic religion, a diabolical religion, a religion of hate. The Jewish religion teaches love for our neighbors. The Golden Rule found enunciation from the lips of a Jewish sage. The modern Jews show their philanthrophy, show their love for humanity by sedulously encouraging, not only their own Jewish charities, but by contributing in large measure to non-Jewish charities as well. A people who have demonstrated in their doctrine and in their practice, that love of humanity is a cardinal tenet of their faith, should not be exposed to a calumny such as this. But the pity of it is that the old Roman adage is true, "Do but calumniate boldly, and some of it will stick."

The Russian government has encouraged bold calumny against the Jews in order to justify as far as it can its restrictive and proscriptive measures against them and to divert attention from its own corruptness. Even if the ritual murder trial of Kiev goes to pieces, and not an inch of ground is left for the false charges that have been built up upon it to rest

upon, there will be some people in whose minds the poison has sunk, who have been inoculated by the virus of prejudice. In order that this poison may be neutralized as far as possible, in order that the dastardly calumny may be revealed in its native falsity, it behooves us, who are informed upon the question, to publish the truth, to make solemn declarations before God and man that there is not a shred of truth in the accusation that the Jews now, or ever, as a whole, or on the part of any one of their sects, made use of the blood of human beings for religious purposes.

The parody on justice enacted in the court at Kiev has added another blot to the black record of Russia's shame. This trial should convey a solemn warning to the whole world that the traducer will grasp any pretext that may serve his ends, that he will go to the limit of constructing his falsehoods out of material that is purely imaginary. Passages from the Bible and the Hebrew writings have been quoted in support of the blood-accusation against the Jews. But in all cases where passages from the Bible and from Hebrew literature were cited, the citations were proved to be ridiculous misinterpretations or wilful forgeries. The ritual-murder accusation is a hideous survival of pagan suspicions against the early Christian church and its communion service, transferred by medieval Christianity to the Jews and their Passover service. It is a libel that can maintain itself only in minds wrought upon by ignorance, superstition, and hysteria. Amen.

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